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ANDREW MARVELL

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ANDREW MARVELL

BY

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He saw the partridge drum in the woods,
He heard the woodcock's evening hymn;
He found the tawny thrushes' broods,
And the shy hawk did wait for him.
What others did at distance hear
And guessed within the thicket's gloom,
Was showed to this philosopher,
And at his bidding seemed to come.

EMERSON, *Wood-notes*.

ANDREW MARVELL

ANDREW MARVELL

I

'LOOK out here', said the old lady at Highgate to Mrs. Hall in 1850; 'here's a view! They say this was Andrew Marvell's writing closet when he wrote *sense*; but when he wrote *poetry* he used to sit below in his garden.'

The subject of this essay is the Andrew Marvell who wrote poetry; the political and theological aspects of his life, and the expression which they found in his satires, his pamphlets, and his letters, will scarcely be touched upon at all. I offer no excuse for this omission. It is purely as a poet that I would consider him; as the poet who wrote *To his Coy Mistress*, *The Garden*, *Bermudas*, *Appleton House*, *The Nymph complaining for the death of her fawn*, the *Mower* poems, and the *Horatian Ode*. Most of these poems were written before Marvell had passed the age of thirty, but it would be a mistake to lay too much stress upon his comparative youthfulness; to endeavour to explain the native freshness of his mind by the fact that all his purely lyrical work was done before middle age; or to lament the transmutation of the poet into the Secretary for Foreign Tongues and Member of Parliament. Marvell, as I understand him, was no Keats or Shelley, moving from strength to strength,

and untimely lopped; he was a man with a genuine but shallow vein of inspiration, out of which he had extracted the maximum yield of riches before he turned to the more mundane activities which satisfied the other side of his temperament. Here is no wastage to deplore. Marvell had done his best, before he set aside the muse of poetry and devoted his talents to the service of his country.

II

IT may be convenient to give, as briefly as possible, the salient facts of Marvell's life. He was born on Easter Eve, 31st March 1621, at Winestead in Holderness, Yorkshire, the fourth child and first son of Andrew Marvell, rector of the parish, and Anne Pease his wife. The Marvells were not Yorkshire people. Although it is not possible to establish any certain connection between the Reverend Andrew and the Marvells of Shepreth and Meldreth in Cambridgeshire, it would appear, on the testimony of Thomas Fuller (*Worthies of England*) that the future divine was born at Meldreth in about 1586, possibly even in the 'ancient manor-house of the usual Elizabethan woodwork', known as The Marvells. The Reverend Andrew is described as a man of piety and learning, facetious in his discourse yet grave in his carriage; a conformist to the established rites of the Church of England, though none of the most over-running or eager in them. A good and sober man, evidently, and one well worthy of the appointment, which fell to him in 1624, of head master and lecturer to the Grammar School at Hull. To Hull, therefore, Andrew Marvell the younger was removed at the age of three, where he

probably, and most suitably, as the future poet of gardens, had the run of the 'great garden' attached to the school, celebrated for its fruit and flowers. Aspersions were later cast by Marvell's enemies on the company he had kept during his boyhood. Not content with describing him as the 'hunger-starved whelp of a country vicar', Bishop Parker goes on to suggest that young Marvell learnt from the boatswains and cabin-boys those rude and incivil expressions which he never afterwards forgot. A generous deduction ought perhaps to be made, however, from the accuracy of accusations launched in controversy. Marvell himself leaves a more pertinent and trustworthy comment on the education that he received at Hull, 'as I remember', he says, 'this scanning of verses was a liberal art that we learned at Grammar School'.

Firmly grounded in his Latin grammar, he was sent with a scholarship to Cambridge, and matriculated as a sizar at Trinity in December 1633. Some authorities dispute this date, on the plea that Marvell was but twelve years old at the time, but in this brief biography the arguments are of small importance; and we may at all events record with certainty that his name was registered as a Scholar in April 1638, and that he took his degree as a Bachelor of Arts in 1639 at the age of eighteen. A small and slightly mysterious incident arises to punctuate the obscurity of his undergraduate years. Tradition relates that Marvell, towards the beginning of his Cambridge career, came under

the influence of the Jesuits and was induced by them to forsake the university and escape to London, whither he was pursued by his father—whose indignation, as an Orthodox minister, may be imagined though it is not recorded;—run to earth in the shop of a bookseller; and induced to return to Trinity. This story may or may not be true, though some corroborative evidence has recently been produced to sustain it; the touch about the bookseller's shop may perhaps be discredited, as too suitably picturesque in the life of a youthful poet; the only point of interest about the whole incident is the suggestion that Marvell, who goes down to history as a Puritan, should once in his impressionable years have flirted with the idea of Catholicism.

But it is not only as a renegade that Marvell figures while at Cambridge. In 1637 appeared in the *Musa Cantabrigiensis*, a collection of Greek and Latin verses celebrating the birth of the Princess Anne, that short-lived scion of royalty who expired three years later with the prayer that God would give her light; and amongst the contributors are found the names of Richard Crashaw, Abraham Cowley, Edward King—himself to be immortalized that same year in *Lycidas*—and Andrew Marvell. After this emergence, we can trace Marvell's life by his registration as a Scholar, and by two domestic sorrows which now befell him: the death of his mother in 1638, and the death of his father in 1640. 'This year, 1640', says the *History*

of Hull, 'the Rev. Mr. Andrew Marvell, sailing over the Humber in company with Madame Skinner of Thornton College and a young beautiful couple who were going to be wedded; a speedy Fate prevented the designed happy union through a violent storm which overset the boat and put a period to all their lives, nor were there any remains of them or the vessel ever after found, though earnestly sought for on distant shores'. Whether the Rev. Andrew, overcome by a presentiment, really exclaimed 'Ho for Heaven!' and threw his staff ashore as he embarked, is not established; nor is it established, though tradition relates it, that the mother of Madame Skinner, adopting the younger Andrew as a son, enabled him to spend the four ensuing years in Continental travel. It is difficult otherwise to explain where he obtained the funds necessary for his journey, unless, indeed, he accompanied some young gentleman in the quality of tutor, a practice very common in his day. For four years Marvell wandered through Holland, France, Switzerland, Spain, and Italy, learning, as Milton was to write later in a letter of recommendation, the Dutch, French, Italian, and Spanish languages, but leaving very little record of his experiences. In 1645 he turns up in Rome, where he meets Richard Flecknoe, an emaciated Catholic priest who held the opinion that England was no place for a man of culture, and who spent his time abroad, scribbling verses and making no secret of his miserable poverty. Marvell, less from kind-

heartedness than from a desire to stop the flow of verse which Flecknoe insisted on reading aloud, asked him to dinner,

> Happy at once to make him Protestant
> And silent. Nothing now dinner stayed
> But till he had himself a body made.
> I mean till he were drest; for else so thin
> He stands, as if he only fed had been
> With consecrated wafers; and the Host
> Hath sure more flesh and blood than he can boast.
> This Basso Rilievo of a man,
> Who as a camel tall, yet easily can
> The needle's eye thread without any stitch. . . .
> But were he not in this black habit deck't,
> This half-transparent man would soon reflect
> Each colour that he past by; and be seen
> As the chameleon, yellow, blue, or green.

Here, then, we have a definite, though unkindly, record of Marvell from his own pen at one point in his wanderings, visiting the spindle-shanks Flecknoe at the sign of the Pelican in Rome. Did he also meet Milton in Rome? It has been suggested, but no evidence is forthcoming to support the suggestion. It is probably nothing more than a romantic legend—and, at best, I submit, less romantic and less moving than the more likely theory that Milton and Marvell did not meet until Milton had become blind, so that Milton never beheld the features of his friend.

By 1646 Marvell was back in England, though his occupation from 1646 to 1650 remains obscure. He was, however, certainly writing poetry.

In 1649, in company with thirteen other poets, he introduced the first edition of Lovelace's *Lucasta*, in verses which although conventional are not contemptible; and in the same year, again associated with other poets—thirty-three of them this time, including Herrick, Denham, and the youthful Dryden—he published his lines *Upon the Death of the Lord Hastings*. In the elegy upon Lord Hastings we find him speaking for the first time with his own poetic accent. The occasion was a conventional one—though Lord Hastings, it appears, was no conventional subject—nevertheless, Marvell made his true voice ring here and there, in three or four lines. 'Go', he says,

> Go, stand betwixt the morning and the flowers,

—a truly Marvellian conceit, which would not seem out of place in any of the later poems—and a little further on he invokes 'drooping Hymeneus',

> Who for sad purple tears his saffron coat,
> And trails his torches through the starry hall
> Reversed, at his darling's funeral.

III

SO we arrive at the year 1650, when Marvell entered Lord Fairfax's household at Nun-appleton House in the Ainstey of York, as tutor to his daughter Mary. Marvell was now twenty-nine, a man with travel and experience behind him, a mature man, standing in the midst of his period of poetic expression. Into the next few years he was to crowd many of the poems which make us remember his name. It has usually been assumed that the majority of his lyrical poems were written while at Appleton House, and it is of course impossible to assign definite dates to those poems where no internal evidence suggests the chronological sequence; there is, for instance, no absolute evidence to prove that Marvell did not wander about Italy with the manuscript of *To his Coy Mistress* in his pocket; nevertheless I shall presently attempt to show some good reason for believing that not only the *Coy Mistress*, the peak of Marvell's poetic achievement, but also *Bermudas* and even *The Garden* were written some years after he had left Lord Fairfax's service, and consequently some years later than the rest of his lyrical poetry. However this may be, it is certain that much of his best work was done at Appleton House, and, more

important than the question of a few years, certain that his experience at Appleton House provided him with a store of memories on which to draw. Appleton House is therefore directly responsible for much, whether Marvell's lines were actually penned within its precincts or not.

Two strange reflections here suggest themselves. The first, that Marvell should never have published any of these poems. Did he not know how good they were? The second—which appears almost to grow out of the first—that so true a poet should have abandoned the writing of poetry and turned, as the old lady said, to writing sense instead. From first to last, it was certainly a cavalier way of treating so pretty a muse. Marvell's muse, indeed, if her spirit survives, has much to complain of. Not only did Marvell himself behave towards her with the utmost ingratitude and nonchalance, but posterity for well over a century did very little better. Dr. Johnson does not mention so much as Marvell's name. We must travel down the years till we reach Coleridge's Mr. Bowles before we find any reasonable appreciation, and even then it is in a few cautious phrases that Marvell is contrasted with Pope; he 'abounds with conceits and false thoughts', though he 'observes little circumstances of rural nature with the eye and feeling of a true poet'; so says Mr. Bowles, and quotes the 'hatching throstle's shining eye' as a 'circumstance new, highly poetical, which could only have been described by a real lover of nature and a witness of her

beauties in her most solitary retirements'. Marvell's own indifference towards his muse is, however, even more surprising than the indifference which melted only with the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Campbell, Hazlitt, and Lamb carried on the campaign begun by Bowles.

Rash as assumptions are in writing biography, it is safe to assume that the atmosphere of Nunappleton House was congenial to Marvell. The poems which he wrote there are the fruits of a contented mind.

> How could such sweet and wholesome hours
> Be reckoned but with herbs and flowers?

In Lord Fairfax himself, but recently retired from an active command, he had a host who appreciated literature and the arts; Lady Fairfax was a woman of character, rough, energetic, and kindly; the task of teaching languages to Mary Fairfax, aged twelve, a plain but amiable child, cannot have been an irksome one. Marvell, when not occupied with his pupil or engaged in conversation with his employers, doubtless had a great deal of time to himself. The park, the garden, the river Wharfe, the water-meadows, the ruins of the old Nunnery, the woods and their inhabitants, all lay open to this witness of Nature's beauties in her most solitary retirements, nor did he fail to make the most of his opportunity. The quiet country existence of Nunappleton released in him the tastes which he could most happily express, and the two years

which he spent there were, poetically, the most fruitful of his life.

Having thus traced Marvell's career as far as Nunappleton, I must hurry over the remaining biographical facts, for the poet is about to become swamped by the politician and satirist, with whom my present purpose has no concern. On leaving Lord Fairfax's service, Marvell obtained from Milton, then Secretary for Foreign Tongues, a letter of recommendation to Lord Bradshaw, but although Milton wrote in warm terms of his friend no appointment was immediately forthcoming. Meanwhile Marvell went to Eton as tutor to Cromwell's ward, a young Mr. William Dutton, but in 1657 the coveted appointment was bestowed upon him, and at a salary of £200 a year he became the associate of Milton and Dryden in the Latin Secretaryship, and was allotted six yards of mourning to wear at Cromwell's funeral. He was now thoroughly involved in public affairs, which were to occupy him till the end of his life. A flood of political satire poured from his pen, together with panegyrics to Cromwell, songs written in honour of Mary Cromwell's marriage, and finally a poem on the death of the Lord Protector. After January of 1659 there was no looking back: Marvell was elected to the House of Commons as member for Hull.

This seat he held until his death in 1678, with occasional absences, once in Holland and once in Russia, Denmark, and Sweden, when he accom-

panied Lord Carlisle on a mission to the rulers of those countries. Space forbids any account of this journey, which, indeed, has nothing but a picturesque interest, and affected Marvell neither as a poet nor as a politician. Equally, I must pass in silence over the theological controversies with Bishop Parker which brought Marvell into considerable notoriety. Nor can I enter into the old argument about his political convictions, as to whether he ran with the hare and hunted with the hounds—as to whether he was or was not, in fact, a turncoat. Personally, my impression is that he was a sensible man, who could appreciate the opportune virtues of Cromwell and yet was prepared, Cromwell being dead, to welcome the Restoration. On the Civil War itself he expressed himself in measured and unequivocal language:

'Whether it be a war of religion or of liberty it is not worth the labour to enquire. Whichsoever was at the top, the other was at the bottom; but upon considering all, I think the cause was too good to have been fought for. Men ought to have trusted God; they ought and might have trusted the King with that whole matter. The arms of the Church are prayers and tears; the arms of the subject are patience and petition. The King himself being of so accurate and piercing a judgment, would soon have felt where it stuck. For men may spare their pains where Nature is at work, and the world will not go faster for our driving. Even as his present Majesty's happy Restoration did

itself, so all things else happen in their best and proper time, without any need of officiousness'.

But these discussions and opinions are irrelevant to Marvell the poet. What is more relevant to Marvell the poet—recording merely that he died suddenly in August 1678, some said by poison, some, more credibly, of apoplexy or of a tertian fever—is to enquire, what kind of man was he in his private life? what were his tastes? what was his condition? was he a lonely man, or one much surrounded by friends? did he spend his time in the town or country? what, in fact, was the difference between the man who wrote poetry and the man who wrote sense? We know, all things considered, a great deal about Andrew Marvell; a great many facts. He was a member of Parliament, he played his part in public life. One or two legends survive about him: that he proposed to write the life of Milton, and that Cromwell proposed to make him superintendent of the gardens at Hampton Court. We possess a fat volume filled with his correspondence. But of 'the man himself', as biographers like to call it, we know very little. His letters are remarkably impersonal. The majority of them are addressed to the Mayor and Corporation of Hull; and as for Mr. William Skinner, he had not the foresight to preserve any of Marvell's letters, but 'gave them to the pastry-maid to put under pie-bottoms'. We do not even know for certain whether he was married or not. True, his poems, after his death, were edited as

'the exact copies of my late dear husband, under his own handwriting, being found since his death among his other papers', by a lady calling herself Mary Marvell, but it is quite possible that Mary Marvell presented herself as a widow before ever she had been a wife, or existed only in the shrewd publisher's imagination. In the whole of Marvell's own correspondence, as in all contemporary writings concerning him, there is no mention whatsoever of a wife; on the contrary, such allusions as were made to his private life, pointed to quite different conclusions. Even in friendship he appears to have been a man of solitary disposition. He himself gives us a brief but significant indication:

> Two Paradises 'twere in one
> To live in Paradise alone,

and the invaluable Aubrey also comes to our help. 'He was in his conversation very modest', he says, 'and of very few words. James Harrington (author of *Oceana*) was his intimate friend; J. Pell, D.D. was one of his acquaintances. He had not a general acquaintance'. Nor was he, it appears, a sociable man. 'Though he loved wine', says Aubrey, 'he never would drink hard in company, and was wont to say that he would not play the good fellow in any man's company in whose hands he would not trust his life. He kept bottles of wine at his lodgings, and many times he would drink liberally by himself, and to refresh his spirit and to exalt his muse'.

He was poor, he was retiring; he had a cottage at Highgate to which he would betake himself 'to enjoy the spring and my privacy'; that he loved nature is sufficiently apparent from his poems. Whether he was a man who sacrificed his personal tastes to his patriotism and his public life, or a man to whom public affairs were the dominant interest, with poetry and nature as youthful, secondary strings, is a question which can never be answered, since he is not here himself to answer it, and probably could not answer it if he were. Such questions are not answerable in the legal exactions of yes and no. The apparent facts of man's life are rarely absolute, even to himself; he draws the strokes, one by one, and is surprised at the final design of the picture. What hope is there, then, for the reconstruction of the biographer? it is no reconstruction that he can hope for, but merely interpretation—a rather more well-intentioned form of fiction. Marvell's personal appearance, at least, tallies well with what we should expect of him: 'of a middling stature, pretty strong-set, roundish faced, cherry cheeked, hazel eye, brown hair', is a satisfactory image of the tutor who watched the hatching throstle and who concentrated into the space of a few years, before he took to more serious matters, a brief outburst of poetry which is remembered although the conscientious letters to the electors of Hull are forgotten. To Marvell the satirist and member of Parliament, Marvell the poet must have seemed

almost a different man. Was it, indeed, himself of whom he had written?—

Thus I, easy philosopher,
Among the birds and trees confer;
And little now, to make me, wants
Or of the fowls, or of the plants.
Give me but wings as they, and I
Straight floating on the air shall fly;
Or turn me but, and you shall see
I was but an inverted tree.

Already I begin to call
In their most learned original;
And where I language want, my signs
The bird upon the bough divines;
And more attentive there doth sit
Than if she were with lime-twigs knit.
No leaf does tremble in the wind
Which I returning cannot find.

Out of these scattered Sibyl's leaves
Strange prophecies my fancy weaves,
And in one history consumes,
Like Mexique paintings, all the plumes.
What Rome, Greece, Palestine, ere said
I in this light mosaic read.
Thrice happy he, who, not mistook,
Hath read in nature's mystic book.

And see how Chance's better wit
Could with a mask my studies hit!
The oak-leaves me embroider all,
Between which caterpillars crawl,
And ivy, with familiar trails,
Me licks, and clasps, and curls, and hales.
Under this antick cope I move
Like some great prelate of the grove. . . .

Bind me, ye woodbines, in your twines,
Curl me about, ye gadding vines,
And oh so close your circles lace
That I may never leave this place.
But, lest your fetters prove too weak,
Ere I your silken bondage break,
Do you, O brambles, chain me too,
And courteous briars nail me through.

Was it, indeed, he who had translated thus from Seneca?—

Climb at court for me that will
Tottering favour's pinnacle;
All I seek is to lie still.
Settled in some secret nest
In calm leisure let me rest;
And far off the public stage
Pass away my silent age.
Thus when without noise, unknown,
I have lived out all my span,
I shall die, without a groan,
An old honest countryman.
Who exposed to other's eyes
Into his own heart ne'er prys,
Death to him's a strange surprise.

IV

LET us, then, forget the member for Hull and return to the young tutor at Nunappleton House. The spring of poetry bubbled pure and clear, but two separate elements become immediately apparent. Nature was Marvell's direct inspirer, but what of John Donne and the fashion of the day? It was not to be expected that Marvell should go free of conceits and 'wit', or that he should resist the temptation of screwing his mind round into the prevailing contortions in the pursuit of some over-complicated and over-subtle conception of the universe or of his own consciousness. Thus a contradiction tore him asunder from the start. Yet this contradiction was perhaps not as violent as would at first sight appear. So strong, so instinctive, is the habit of mind of one's own age, that the conceits of the metaphysical poets—to us frequently so tortured and so extravagant—to them formed an intrinsic part of the process of poetic expression. Their sensibility and the garment of words and images which clothed it were indivisible.

'If my busy imagination',

wrote Cowley,

'Do not thee in all things fashion,
So, that all fair species be
Hieroglyphic marks of thee. . . .'

addressing to his mistress these lines which he might as pertinently have addressed to his muse. The busy imagination must be fashioning all things to its own uses; 'forcing some odd similitude;' discovering, as Dr. Johnson said, 'a kind of discordia concors . . . occult resemblances in things apparently unlike'. It was only when the joint processes of conception (inspiration) and expression became perfectly fused that the resulting poem attained the finality of a work of art. As Donne wrote—if for the word religion we may substitute the word poetry:

> Nor may we hope to sodder still and knit
> These two, and dare to break them; nor must wit
> Be colleague to religion, but be it.

Nothing short of that perfect fusion could redeem poetic wit from absurdity, and transform it into a unity which, to any taste and in any age, should be completely satisfying. Unfortunately, this system of mental jugglery and acrobatics was an exceedingly difficult and ticklish game to practice, and even in the most expert hands was apt to bring the performer and his apparatus clattering to the ground. Donne himself, the great master and apostle of the fashion, was capable of writing such lines as these, comparing a roving man and his stay-at-home wife to a pair of compasses:

> If they be two, they are two so
> As stiff twin-compasses are two;
> Thy soul the fixt foot, makes no show
> To move, but doth, if th'other do.

> And though it in the centre sit,
> Yet when the other far doth roam,
> It leans, and hearkens after it,
> And grows erect, as that comes home.

And if Donne could write thus, what became of the preposterous, stretched analogy in the hands of a lesser man?

> Upwards thou dost weep,
> Heaven's bosom drinks the gentle stream.
> Where the milky rivers creep,
> Thine floats above, *and is the cream.*

It is cheap, and easy, to multiply such instances; it is easy to say that the trick was caught from Donne, and that Donne himself was but 'the final result of the exaggerated importance attached by the schoolmen to the study of logic'. Such criticism is as shallow as it is pedantic. The use of metaphor is part of the very nature of poetry, and if we are to seek for some explanation of the distended and pot-bellied proportions which it sometimes acquired in the hands of the metaphysical poets, we shall do better to look for it in the natural development from the Elizabethan imagination. When Shakespeare says,

> This my hand will rather
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
> Making the green one red,

he uses an image quite as violent and, rationally, as improbable as any we could wish to find, yet the effect is not grotesque: it is terrible and just,

because the image is perfectly matched with the weight of the emotion it reveals. The perfect fusion has been achieved. But obviously such an example might develop along dangerous lines. The metaphysical poets were intoxicated—if one may apply so excitable a word to writers so severely and deliberately intellectual—by the potentialities of metaphor. They saw in it an opportunity for expressing their intimations of the unknown and the dimly suspected Absolute in terms of the known concrete, whether those intimations related to philosophic, mystical, or intellectual experience, to religion, or to love. They were 'struck with these great concurrences of things'; they were persuaded that,

> Below the bottom of the great abyss
> There where one centre reconciles all things,
> The World's profound heart pants,

and no doubt they believed that if they kept to the task with sufficient determination, they would succeed in catching the world's profound heart in the net of their words.

> Nel suo profondo vidi che s'interna,
> Legato con amore in un volume,
> Ciò che per l'universo si squaderna;
>
> Sustanzia ed accidenti, e lor costume,
> Quasi conflati insieme per tal modo
> Che ciò ch'io dico e un semplice lume.

It is clear enough from their constant allusions to their own poetic method that they were highly

self-conscious and very well aware of the aim they were pursuing. They were no naïve or artless singers, yet apparently they were incapable of seeing the difference between Donne's image of the compasses, and so perfect and magnificent a symbol as, say, Vaughan's vision of the world:

> I saw Eternity the other night,
> Like a great Ring of pure and endless light,
> All calm, as it was bright,
> And round beneath it, Time in hours, days, years
> Driv'n by the spheres
> Like a vast shadow mov'd, in which the world
> And all her train were hurl'd ;
> The doting lover in his quaintest strain
> Did there complain,
> Near him, his lute, his fancy, and his flights,
> Wit's sour delights. . . .

Their very lack of self-criticism is in itself an earnest of their good faith; of that sincerity, of that truth in untruth, which made their symbolism so inevitable a part of their thought; and here, again, the contradiction is not so strange as it might seem, for the faculty of self-criticism has never been the strong point of poets.

Let us now see how Marvell was affected by the fashion for wit and metaphor; in what way he differed from, and in what way he resembled, his contemporaries.

V

WE will take the differences first. Temperamentally, Marvell was open to *direct* inspiration, a statement which is not modified by the indisputable fact that the current fashion did frequently trick out his muse with some of her ribbons and furbelows. The source of his direct inspiration was nature; orderly, detailed nature; nature as he saw it in England—though, to be sure, the exotic had a charm for him, for decorative purposes. But that is by the way. At Nunappleton he was living in an English house, surrounded by an English garden, all typical of their kind, and all suited to release precisely the sentiments that best accorded with his natural taste. At these, at any rate, he could look straight with eyes unaltered by any fashionable spectacles:

> Thrice happy he who, not mistook,
> Hath read in Nature's mystic book!

Much stress has been laid by critics upon this faculty of Marvell's; this faculty of direct vision uninfluenced by contemporary literary taste. 'Their [the Nunappleton poems] isolated character is hardly sufficiently recognized . . . they have no relation to anything else in their own age;' this quotation from Sir Edmund Gosse may serve as

an instance. I cannot wholly agree that such directness was peculiar to Marvell, in his own age. We have only to think of Herbert, whose lines

> I read, and sigh, and wish I were a tree,
> For then I sure should grow
> To fruit or shade; at least some bird would trust
> Her household to me, and I should be just,

recall Marvell's own

> Turn me but, and you shall see
> I was but an inverted tree,

or Cowley's

> Oh Fountains, when in you shall I
> Myself, eased of unpeaceful thoughts, espy?
> Oh Fields, oh woods, when, when shall I be made
> The happy tenant of your shade?

to see that such flashes of personal intimacy and the desire for identification with nature were common to English poets in Marvell's age as in nearly every other. But here is the difference: to Marvell, in the brief years of his poetic creation, the mood was constant. It was no mere occasional flash. Conceits, when they occurred, were an ornament—or shall I say a disfigurement?—rather than an integral part; his real mood, in these nature poems, was the mood of seeing, and feeling; the mysticism which arose as their accompaniment was no conceit, but an inevitable consequence, familiar to everyone who has ever entered into a moment of

communion with nature; and, as such, expressed by him in a manner readily distinguishable from the cerebral exertions of his colleagues. There were, in fact, two aspects of Marvell's closeness to nature. The one was the actual gift of observation—an estimable but still a minor gift; the other was that sense of man's eventual harmony with nature, which for want of a better word we must call mysticism in this connection. Critical remarks, as Dr. Johnson justly observed, are not easily understood without examples. Fortunately, examples may be picked off Marvell's pages as readily as apples off a tree. To illustrate his power of observation, I will quote neither the hatching throstle, nor the woodpecker that

> tinkling with his beak
> Does find the hollow oak to speak,

nor the hamstring'd frogs, nor the low-roofed tortoises, but rather the mower Damon,

> . . . known
> Through all the meadows I have mown.
> On me the morn her dew distills
> Before her darling daffodils,

which is of a lyrical directness that Wordsworth might have envied; and for his sense of identification with nature let us take this:

> Here at the fountain's sliding foot
> Or at some fruit-tree's mossy root,
> Casting the body's vest aside
> My soul into the boughs does glide:

> There like a bird it sits, and sings,
> Then whets and combs its silver wings,
> And, till prepared for longer flight,
> Waves in its plumes the various light.

By no perversity of judgment can this exquisite image be called a conceit. It is structural, not ornamental. If it recalls anything at all, it recalls *Il Penseroso*:

> And let some strange mysterious dream
> Wave at his wings in airy stream,

and if any poet by his single example could have reversed the habits of the school of wit, that poet would certainly have been Milton.

But the principal clue to Marvell's nature-mysticism lies, I think, in the obsession that green had for him. Most commentators on Marvell have remarked upon his frequent use of the word, but none except perhaps M. Legouis has laid quite sufficient stress upon its significance in his vocabulary. He used it in and out of season, and moreover he supplemented it by constant references to shade and shadow, which were all part of the same line of thought. Marvell was highly sensitive to colour—an argument which could be substantiated by numerous instances;—all variations of light and shade were to him a perpetual delight; but of all colours it was green that enchanted him most; the world of his mind was a glaucous world, as though he lived in a coppice, stippled with sunlight and alive with moving shadows:

> Green-dense and dim-delicious, bred o' the sun.

Clearly, green was to him

> The mystery, the sign you must not touch,
> For 'tis my outward soul;

the cipher of some significance that he was forever trying to capture. With the mysterious author of *King Edward III* he might have exclaimed:

> Since green our thoughts, green be the conventicle
> Where we will ease us by disburdening 'em,

and throughout his poems he pursues the final, elusive epitome. Sometimes he contents himself with the merely descriptive adjective,

> So architects do square and hew
> Green trees that in the forest grew;

sometimes he uses it in a more general sense:

> No white nor red was ever seen
> So amorous as this lovely green;

sometimes he mixes it with his other pre-occupation, as in

> Sorted by pairs they still are seen
> By fountains cool, and shadows green,

a line in which he is getting a step closer to what he really wants to say; and mixes it again, though the word green does not actually occur, in the verse already quoted,

> 'Here at the fountain's sliding foot', etc.,

which is, in fact, if carefully analysed, nothing less than a study in green and silver. He gets close again when he

> hangs in shades the orange bright,
> Like golden lamps in a green night,

and closer still in *The Mower's Song*:

> My mind was once the true survey
> Of all these meadows fresh and gay,
> And in the greenness of the grass
> Did see its hopes as in a glass,

and again in the same poem:

> And thus, ye meadows, which have been
> Companions of my thought more green,
> Shall now the heraldry become
> With which I shall adorn my tomb.

Still he has not quite summed it up; still he has not crept right into the heart of

> il pian silenzio verde.

In the woods of Nunappleton he tries to find it:

> But I, retiring from the flood,
> Take sanctuary in the wood;
> And, while it lasts, myself imbark
> In this yet green, yet growing ark,

where

> Dark all without it knits; within
> It opens passable and thin. . . .
> The arching boughs unite between
> The columns of the temple green,

but the complete identification comes as a sudden, triumphant cry:

> Annihilating all that's made
> To a green thought in a green shade.

VI

IT was not in vain that Marvell had chased his cipher through poem after poem, not in vain that he had called his love a 'vegetable love', if at a given moment he was to throw the net of language so finally over the illusion. With Apollo he had hunted Daphne, and with Pan had sped after Syrinx, that he might at last clasp a tree in his arms. So long as he followed what I have called his direct inspiration, so long as he admitted only the mystical-metaphorical interpretations of that inspiration he was on safe ground. It was when he entered into competition with his colleagues that he went wrong, and in no poem is the difference between his two manners so well exemplified as in *Appleton House*, opening as it does with a string of grotesque exaggerations which must be endured before the poem flows out into the simple and splendid verses that rank with Marvell at his best. It is deplorable that the poet who could write verses LXV to LXXIV and LXXVII and LXXXI should also have written, in the same poem, such absurdity as:

> Yet thus the laden house does sweat,
> And scarce endures the Master great;

But where he comes, the swelling hall
Stirs, and the square grows spherical,
More by his magnitude distrest
Than he is by its straitness prest.

This is in the worst, most inflated style of the metaphysicians, and cannot be excused even by saying that the language of compliment was always notoriously exaggerated. But before considering the Marvell who shared the faults of his day, it is as well to remember also the Marvell of a middle manner; the Marvell who wrote, for instance, *The Nymph complaining for the death of her fawn*. Here is a poem whose inspiration cannot be said to be personal or wholly direct; it is, moreover, a poem full of conceits; yet the effect is not one of straining or insincerity, but rather of a graceful and deliberate artificiality, underlaid by some genuine compassion—whether for the nymph or for her fawn matters not.

For it was full of sport; and light
Of foot and heart; and did invite
Me to its game; it seemed to bless
Itself in me. How could I less
Than love it? Oh, I cannot be
Unkind, t'a beast that loveth me.

Then comes the description, full of grace, yet not sentimental—Marvell was never sentimental:

I have a garden of my own,
But so with roses overgrown
And lilies, that you would it guess
To be a little wilderness.

And all the spring time of the year
It only loved to be there.
Among the beds of lilies, I
Have sought it oft, where it should lie;
Yet could not, till itself would rise,
Find it, although before mine eyes.
For, in the flaxen lilies' shade,
It like a bank of lilies laid.

and then the hyperbole, which is a triumph of nice balancing between the admissible and the extravagant:

Upon the roses it would feed
Until its lips ev'n seemed to bleed;
And then to me 'twould boldly trip
And print those roses on my lip.
But all its chief delight was still
On roses thus itself to fill,
And its pure virgin limbs to fold
In whitest sheets of lilies cold.
Had it lived long, it would have been
Lilies without, roses within.

This is neither the true country poet nor yet the poet of the true school of wit, but a pastoral poet uniting the rural and the courtly styles. *The picture of little T.C. in a prospect of flowers* may come in the same category, *Damon the Mower*, *The Mower's Song*, and *Ametas and Thestylis making hayropes*, and so likewise may occasional verses strewn throughout the poems, as for example this strophe from *The Gallery*:

. . . thou'rt drawn
Like to Aurora in the dawn,
When in the east she slumb'ring lies
And stretches out her milky thighs;

> While all the morning quire does sing,
> And manna falls, and roses spring ;
> And, at thy feet, the wooing doves
> Sit perfecting their harmless loves.

This aspect of Marvell has been strangely overlooked; he has received his full meed of recognition as a nature poet, and his full meed of disapprobation as the poet who had submitted, all too readily, to the influence of Donne; but this halfway house, this amalgam of the natural and artificial, has never been given sufficient prominence. His very choice of the Mower as the central figure in no less than four poems illustrates his sense of the decorative value of rustic employments. Marvell's Mower simply takes the place of the traditional shepherd. It was Marvell who discovered the scythesman as an ornament to poetry, and who for *bergerie* substituted *faucherie*. This discovery is all the more remarkable when we consider that Theocritus makes of his Reapers but a pretext to talk of love, and that Virgil alludes but very briefly to the reaper in the *Eclogues*, and in the *Georgics* mentions him not at all. Moreover, both the Greek and the Roman poet thought of the reaper of corn, whereas Marvell's mower—it is scarcely surprising—is the mower of grass. Another interesting point arises in connection with the Mower poems: Marvell had some appreciation of uncultivated nature, which was not at all proper to the seventeenth century. True, his usual taste was for the mild and orderly aspects of

garden-craft, and rugged nature was a thing unknown to him; nevertheless, he gives some indications of an appetite for something a little less sleek, a little less demure. In *Appleton House* he had allowed this sentiment to escape him:

> . . . Nature here hath been so free
> As if she said, 'Leave this to me.'
> Art would more neatly have defaced
> What she had laid so sweetly waste,

and in *The Mower against gardens* he writes a complete poem in condemnation of a pleasant artificiality:

> 'Tis all enforced: the fountain and the grot,
> While the sweet fields do lie forgot,
> Where willing Nature does to all dispense
> A wild and fragrant innocence.

Obviously, this is no foreshadowing of the romantic poets; Capability Brown would doubtless have been more to Marvell's taste than Helvellyn; but the hint is worth noting, in conjunction with his constant desire to identify himself with nature in the shape of trees and birds and woods.

'The Gods themselves', he wrote, 'the gods themselves with us do dwell.'

VII

IT is necessary, however, to turn to that other Marvell—the Marvell who had read too much of Donne, and who exercised his wit either upon ethical questions, or upon love, or even upon religion. It is not to be denied that this Marvell suffered from the faults of his contemporaries. He was capable of writing such preposterous rubbish as the notorious

> Upon the rock his Mother drave,
> And there she split against the stone
> In a Caesarian section;

he took pleasure in the metaphors drawn from cosmography or geometry which were so fruitful a source of disaster, and, like all his fellows, sometimes he managed them successfully and sometimes he came to grief. Sometimes, again, the question of his success or failure is debatable, and must be resolved by personal taste. What are we to say, for example, of these two verses:

> Unless the giddy Heaven fall,
> And Earth some new convulsion tear,
> And us, to join, the World should all
> Be cramped into a planisphere.

As lines so loves oblique may well
Themselves in every angle greet
But ours so truly parallel,
Though infinite can never meet?

or of this, where the beauty of the first two lines almost redeems the extravagance of the two following:

How wide they dream! The Indian slaves
That sink for pearl through seas profound,
Would find her tears yet deeper waves
And not of one the bottom sound?

If we except *Appleton House*, it is, generally speaking, noticeable that Marvell's use of injudicious conceits occurs most frequently in poems which we may presume him to have written round a deliberate thesis—such poems as *Eyes and Tears*, *The Match*, and *Upon the Hill and Grove at Billborow*. There are other poems which I am reluctant to include. Is *On a drop of dew* to be condemned? or *The Coronet*? or *The Gallery*? or *The Fair Singer*? or the *Definition of Love*, characteristic of the metaphysical school though it is, with its splendid opening?—

My love is of a birth as rare
As 'tis for object strange and high:
It was begotten of Despair
Upon Impossibility.

Surely not. Conscientiously though one may search through the pages of Marvell's lyrics, the worst offences are not to be found in him. It is impossible to imagine Marvell writing such a set of

verses as Cleveland's *Fuscara*. Moreover, the true poet bursts out in the most unexpected places, as:

> Near this, a fountain's liquid bell
> Tinkles within the concave shell.
> Might a soul bathe there and be clean,
> Or slake its drought?

or—the shallower but still charming Marvell:

> Through every garden, every mead,
> I gather flowers; (my fruits are only flowers,)

or, most unexpected of all, the 'old honest countryman', the garden-poet, suddenly interposing himself in the midst of an Horatian ode upon Cromwell:

> So when the falcon high
> Falls heavy from the sky,
> She, having killed, no more does search,
> But on the next green bough to perch.

The poet in Marvell died hard, whether he tried to stifle that poet under the weight of fashion or under an absorption in public affairs. And this mention brings me to yet another aspect of Marvell, which must not be forgotten.

We have considered him as a nature-poet, as a pastoral poet, and as a poet of the school of wit; to consider him as a satirist lies outside the scheme of this essay, but there is a group of poems which straddles across the frontier between lyricism and politics. This group includes the *Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's return from Ireland*, *The First Anniversary of the government under O. C.*, and *The Poem*

upon the death of O. C. The Horatian ode is almost too well known to admit of quotation, but it throws so revealing a light upon Marvell's eminently reasonable and impartial attitude about public events that a few excerpts may be allowed. I have already quoted a passage from the *Rehearsal Transprosed* in defence of Marvell's alleged political inconsistency; the Horatian ode will bear out the opinions expressed therein, not so much in the famous lines upon the execution of Charles I,

> He nothing common did or mean
> Upon that memorable scene:
> But with his keener eye
> The axe's edge did try,
> Nor called the gods with vulgar spite
> To vindicate his helpless right,
> But bow'd his comely head
> Down, as upon a bed,

as in these four significant lines:

> Though Justice against Fate complain,
> And plead the ancient rights in vain:
> But these do hold or break
> As men are strong or weak,

a fatalistic creed which foreshadows his later words: 'Men may spare their pains where Nature is at work, and the world will not go faster for our driving'. The time was ripe for Cromwell, and, though Marvell did not approve of civil war, and thought on the whole that men 'ought to have trusted the King', he recognized that according to

the laws of nature the weak man must be broken by the strong,

> For to be Cromwell was a greater thing
> Then aught below or yet above a King.

But what has he to say of Cromwell himself? since our concern here is less with Marvell's political convictions than with his vision as a man and a poet. The poem upon the death of Cromwell opens with an account of Cromwell's affection for his daughter and grief at her death, all in conventional strain; but the poet in Marvell, as has been said, was liable to burst the conventional fetters:

> 'All, all is gone,'

he exclaims suddenly,

> 'All, all is gone of ours or his delight
> In horses fierce, wild deer, or armour bright,'

and from convention the poem swings to actual experience and interpretation:

> I saw him dead. A leaden slumber lies
> And mortal sleep over those wakeful eyes.
> Those gentle rays under the lids were fled
> Which through his looks that piercing sweetness shed;
> That port which so majestic was and strong,
> Loose and deprived of vigour, stretched along,
> All withered, all discoloured, pale and wan,
> How much another thing, no more that man?
> Oh, human glory, vain; oh, death, oh, wings,
> Oh, worthless world; oh transitory things! . . .

Saw Marvell Cromwell dead? saw Milton Marvell ever? Poetry is a cynically lying jade, and her evidence is of no account.

VIII

THE record which Marvell has left of his own views on literature is extremely scanty. In a letter to Lord Wharton he criticizes the English translation of a Latin poem: 'The Latin hath several excellent heights, but the English translation is not so good, and both of them strain for wit and conceit more than becomes the gravity of the author or the sadness of the subject'. This extract, slight as it is, has a certain interest both in showing Marvell's attitude towards wit and conceit, and in its allusion to translation, when we remember that Marvell himself—a Greek and Latin scholar—composed Latin versions of his own poems *On a drop of dew* and *The Garden*. Another and more specific allusion to translation occurs in the lines to Dr. Witty:

> Some in this task
> Take off the cypress veil, but leave a mask,
> Changing the Latin, but do more obscure
> That sense in English which was bright and pure.
> So of translators they are authors grown,
> For ill translators make the book their own.
> Others do strive with words and forced phrase
> To add such lustre, and so many rays,
> That but to make the vessel shining, they
> Much of the precious metal rub away.

He is translation's thief that addeth more,
As much as he that taketh from the store
Of the first author. Here he maketh blots
That mends; and added beauties are but spots. . .
And (if I judgment have) I censure right:
For something guides my hand that I must write,

nor must the lines on *Paradise Lost* be forgotten:

Well might'st thou scorn thy readers to allure
With tinkling rhyme, of thy own sense secure;
While the Town-bays writes all the while and spells,
And like a pack-horse tires without his bells.
Their fancies like our bushy points appear,
The poets tag them; we for fashion wear.
I too transported by the mode offend,
And while I meant to praise thee, must commend.
Thy verse created like thy theme sublime,
In number, weight, and measure, needs not rhyme.

but with these few quotations the entire stock of Marvell's literary criticism is exhausted.

IX

ONCE at least in his career as a poet Marvell achieved the perfect marriage between conception and expression in a poem which owes nothing to his own particular source of inspiration by nature; nothing to his sense of the pastoral; nothing to stirring events; but, curiously enough, much to the school of Donne. In *To his Coy Mistress*, Donne and the school of wit together are superbly justified. *To his Coy Mistress* is the supreme example of the metaphysical method of packing image upon image, and of suddenly relating them to the problems of human existence. It combines all the jugglery of 'wit', and all the grisly melancholy of Donne. *To his Coy Mistress* is unique in Marvell's work. Whether it was written under the stress of an actual exasperation, or whether the theme (though eternal), was in fact imaginary, is irrelevant; all that concerns us is the complete success of the poem as a whole. Although the analysis of poetry is often but a dry and unpleasing occupation, the analysis of the *Coy Mistress* really does yield some results; and if the writing of poetry could be learnt by such methods, the *Coy Mistress* is pre-eminently one of the poems from which we best could learn it. The urgency of pas-

sion is its theme, expounded in language which moves from an apparently extravagant frivolity to an intense and menacing seriousness; then swings back to the human plea again, still decoratively presented, but sobered now and dignified by the reflections on mortality which have intervened. It is, in fact, as nicely constructed as a geometrical problem in two propositions and a solution. 'Had we the whole of time before us, we might dally ingeniously and with grace; but life is short, and the grave will divide us eternally; therefore let us make the most of the moment while we can'. The three sections are unequally divided: twenty lines to the first, twelve to the second, fourteen to the third; forty-six short lines into which are crowded, but without any jostling or confusion, the maximum number of ideas and images. So many things have seldom been said in so few words; yet the effect is of great luxuriance rather than of economy or compression. The perfection of the phrasing can only be realized if we try to paraphrase the poem and discover the impossibility of substituting other words for Marvell's. The whole poem is as tight and hard as a knot; yet as spilling and voluptuous as a horn of plenty.

Equally repaying are the minor technical details of the poem—which, indeed, as a study is inexhaustible. The octosyllabic line in Marvell's hands became a medium of the utmost elasticity; it was his favourite metre, and he employs it in nearly three-quarters of his total lyrical output. In

the *Coy Mistress* he makes particularly effective use of enjambment (noticeably absent in both *Bermudas* and *The Garden*).

> Thou by the Indian Ganges side
> Should'st rubies find; I by the tide
> Of Humber would complain. I would
> Love you ten years before the Flood,

and

> Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
> My echoing song;

are the most drastic instances, but there are at least four other couplets which would serve almost equally well for illustration. This, combined with the large proportion of short syllables, explains the effect of rapidity produced by the poem, so admirably adapted to the impatience of the theme. The actual vocabulary plays an important part in the suggestion of subtlety and richness, which might well have been lost in the racing speed that drives the lines along. It is scarcely necessary to pick out the unusual words; they speak for themselves; or to argue such points as the mysterious 'lew'; nor, possibly, would English readers appreciate the insistence of a French critic upon the brutally concrete significance of the lines

> . . . then worms shall try
> That long-preserved virginity,
> And your quaint honour turn to dust,

a significance which, as he rightly observes, would be 'characteristic of the taste of Donne and his

school', supporting his argument by a reference to the definition of the words 'quaint' and 'honour' in the New English Dictionary. Attention may, however, be drawn to the several verbal surprises which supplement the main device of 'surprise' occurring half-way through the poem:

> But at my back I always hear
> Time's winged chariot hurrying near. . . .

These verbal surprises are principally based, of course, upon the rich poetic resource of startling but felicitous association: Ganges—rubies; tide —Humber; vegetable—Love and Empire; deserts—Eternity; strength—sweetness; but Marvell makes use also of telling antithesis:

> Let us . . .
> Rather at once our time devour
> Than languish in his slow-chapt power, . . .
> And tear our pleasures with rough strife
> Through the iron gates of life,

—though, to be sure, Tennyson used to say he wished Marvell had written 'grates' instead of 'gates'.

The use of the consonant V, which occurs no less than seventeen times in the forty-six lines, reinforced by the companion F, is also worth noting. It is not pushing analysis too far to suggest that this use of V is largely responsible for the harmony of

> My vegetable love should grow
> Vaster than empires, and more slow,

and that the alliance of V and F is important in

> The grave's a fine and private place,

which both in euphony and sentiment recalls Cowley's

> After death I nothing crave.
> Let me alive my pleasure have,
> All are Stoicks in the grave.

This, indeed, is not the only line which suggests a resemblance between the two poets, but on which side the debt lay is harder to determine. (The notion of a debt must, I think, be accepted, since a double coincidence would be out of the question, nor must we further complicate it by dwelling upon Herrick's

> For I know, in the tombs
> There's no carousing.)

The second line to which I refer is, of course,

> Deserts of vast eternity,

which carries the mind at once to *The Mistress*,

> And all beyond is vast eternity,

Now, *The Mistress* had appeared in 1647; it would therefore have been quite possible for Marvell to have read it before composing his own poem; moreover, other resemblances to Cowley occur in his *Dialogue between the Resolved Soul and Created Pleasure*, the *Definition of Love*, *Mourning*, *The Garden*, and *The Match*, which, taken all together,

confirm the idea that Marvell was familiar with Cowley's early work. On the other hand Cowley's lines about the grave appear in his *Anacreontiques*, which were not published until they were included in his *Miscellanies* in 1656. What are we therefore to assume? We are almost forced to conclude that Marvell was the borrower in both cases, since it is highly improbable that Cowley could have seen the *Coy Mistress* in manuscript and stolen 'vast eternity' for his own poem; Cowley, from 1646 to 1656, was living on the Continent in the service of the exiled queen, where Marvell's manuscript would not have been likely to come his way; and any printed edition of Marvell's work is entirely out of the question, since this was not published until fourteen years after Cowley's death. This conclusion, that Marvell was the borrower not only of 'vast eternity' but also of the reflection about the grave, postulates that the *Coy Mistress* was not written until after 1656 (the date of publication of the *Anacreontiques*), considerably later than the rest of his lyric poetry.

The question is, therefore, interesting in so far as it introduces the possibility that Marvell's years of lyrical productiveness were not, in fact, as has usually been supposed, limited to the pre-Appleton House and Appleton House period, a possibility which is borne out by a consideration of *Bermudas*. In 1653, after leaving Lord Fairfax's service, Marvell, having failed to obtain the post of Milton's assistant, went as tutor to William Dutton at Eton where pupil and master lived together in the house

of John Oxenbridge. This John Oxenbridge had twice visited the Bermudas, and it is legitimate to suppose that his accounts of those remote islands, no less than an acquaintance with Waller's recently published *Battle of the Summer Islands*, prompted Marvell to the composition of his poem. Clearly, Marvell, like most poets, was not particular as to the flint which struck sparks from his tinder. John Oxenbridge, Waller, Plutarch, and Captain John Smith in his *General History of Virginia*, all contributed their quota to *Bermudas*. From Waller, indeed, he borrowed shamelessly, but his alchemy produced a very different ore from Waller's

> . . . happy island where huge lemons grow,
> And orange-trees, which golden fruit do bear,
> Th'Hesperian garden boasts of none so fair ;
> Where shining pearl, and coral, many a pound,
> On the rich shore, of ambergris is found.
> The lofty cedar, which to heaven aspires,
> The prince of trees, is fuel for their fires! . . .
> With candy'd plantains and the juicy pine
> On choicest melons and sweet grapes they dine.

Waller's poem, which indeed is mock-heroic, restricts itself to mere description; Marvell's is nothing less than the small epic of the Puritan emigration, and beneath the descriptive passages glows a fervour which is rarely met with in his graceful pages. But this is not the point I wish to make. I am attempting now to establish some chronology for Marvell's lyrical work; and if we are to accept the assumption that *Bermudas* was

written at Eton, that is to say between 1653 and 1657, what are we to say of *The Garden*? At first sight it would appear reasonable to suppose that *The Garden* was written in the leisure of the days at Appleton House, and to this period in Marvell's life it has usually been ascribed; but, without wishing to press the point too far, it is undeniable that certain resemblances exist between *Bermudas* and *The Garden*, which at least indicate that the two poems have some bearing upon one another. Consider these parallel passages, the first from *Bermudas*, the second from *The Garden*:

> He makes the figs our mouths to meet
> And throws the melons at our feet,
> But apples plants of such a price
> No tree could ever bear them twice,

and,

> What wondrous life in this I lead!
> Ripe apples drop about my head;
> The luscious clusters of the vine
> Upon my mouth do crush their wine. . . .
> Stumbling on melons, as I pass,
> Ensnared with flowers, I fall on grass.

Was *The Garden* then written subsequent to *Bermudas*? or, in writing *Bermudas*, was Marvell merely borrowing from himself?—the most honourable form of plagiarism. The question, at best, is but one of a literary curiosity.

X

WHAT, then, when all has been said, is our eventual estimate of Marvell? That depends largely upon the degree of exorbitance with which we approach a poet, forgetful perhaps of the slender quantity of lines upon which many a lasting reputation has been built. We need look no further than Lovelace and Waller, among Marvell's own contemporaries, for proof. Poets vary, but most are more prolific than they should be; less fastidious than they might be, that is to say, in the chosen residue of their work that they expose to the judgment of the world. (Yet fecundity in itself is often a measure of a poet's greatness, provided the quality maintain a sufficient, even though intermittent, standard; and no poet, as experience proves, can be expected to act as his own editor. Wordsworth and Tennyson, not to mention Swinburne, were their own worst enemies.) Time and posterity, fortunately, act as sieves, and in the end it is often for a few pages of print, at most, that a poet is remembered; a few moments distilled out of all the years of his life. If, therefore, we are to remember Marvell by his best, we shall be obliged to place him high, as the author of at least one super-

latively excellent poem—*To his Coy Mistress*—and as the author of *The Garden*, *Bermudas*, *The Horatian Ode*, part of *Appleton House*, *The Nymph complaining*, and the translation from Seneca. It is unreasonable to demand more of any minor poet.

The word minor has slipped in, and must be allowed to stand. Marvell seldom strikes the more resonant chord. He strikes it once, and with firm fingers, in the centre panel of the *Coy Mistress*; he strikes it again, in the passage I have quoted from the poem on the death of Cromwell; and in his pursuit of the cipher represented by *green* he strikes it repeatedly, or at any rate evokes it; for the rest, we must concede that Marvell, poetically charming, is spiritually somewhat shallow. This comment is not intended to suggest that poetry should be concerned with moral reflections; far from it, Heaven forbid! nevertheless, some implication must be latent, before poetry can aspire to be considered as anything approaching major poetry; and such implication, in Marvell, is frankly lacking. Even to look for it, is attempting to gather grapes off thistles. The *Coy Mistress* is largely to blame; she is the cavern which makes the student of Marvell try again and again hopefully for echoes. But where are the echoes to be found? in Marvell's nature-mysticism alone lies some connection. The solitude of the grave and the solitude of the forest are separated by no very great distance, and Marvell, though not often perplexed by the problems

of mortality, *was* very constantly preoccupied with the desire for human union with nature—even though that union was to be his own, and the desire never extended itself in any general sense. This is the utmost that we can say. Marvell had his limitations. The vein of his finer inspiration was a genuine one, but we require something further before we can attribute greatness to a poet. The *Coy Mistress* alone in Marvell's work deserves the word.

His skill was considerable, and it was to something in his temperament rather than to any default in his art that his comparative failure was due. By temperament a man with a love of solitude, the streak of philosophic loneliness in him was rapidly buried under his interest in worldly affairs, and the elements of mysticism in him were counteracted by a certain robust virility which drove him to occupations more active than the delights of a life of contemplation. His highest plot was not really to plant the bergamot, though at moments he liked to think so. This virility is everywhere apparent in his poems, not only in the *Coy Mistress*, but in the healthy sensuality of his love for colour, scents, music: a professed Puritan, he was consistent neither in his politics nor in his personal tastes. His was a dual nature, and the gentler side went undermost. There is, of course, no intrinsic reason why such virility of nature should be damaging to a poet—the *Coy Mistress* is a proof to the contrary—no reason why an energetic public life should

not run parallel with a private life of poetic production; but at the same time it must, I think, be admitted that in the hale sanity of Marvell's mind very little room could be found for those underlying doubts and perplexities which are implicit in all poetry of the noblest order. The very peg upon which he hung his imagination—for it does, when all is said and done, deserve the name of imagination as opposed to the minor dignity of fancy—the very peg upon which he hung his imagination in itself gives proof of a tame, somewhat smug, material outlook. Order, safety, gardens; the simple pleasures and beauties of the cultivated English country-side; the leisure of the cultured mind—for it must always be remembered that Marvell was a man with a classical education behind him—the treat of a sophisticated solitude; such were the ingredients which went to the making of Marvell as a poet. His was no uneasy soul.

Consequently it is probably a mistake even to discuss the possibility of Marvell's admission to the higher plane. We should do better to accept him as the poet of the happy garden-state, the painter of country delights, a miniaturist of the foreground with some suggestion of indistinct, green, and significant background to redeem him from the superficiality of the mere observer and recorder. That coy and tantalizing mistress is again to blame: she, woman or myth, made Marvell strike a note such as he never really hit before or since. She, and not Cromwell, not Hull, not

Bishop Parker, is the real enemy of Marvell for posterity. She it is who makes us covetously demand from Marvell more than he was ever temperamentally fitted to give.

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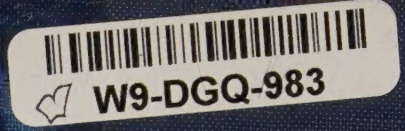
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